

Message Text

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S/S:MR. SEBASTIAN
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 047725

STADIS////////////////////////////////////
EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR FROM NEA/ARN DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, US

SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWS: VISITS OF HECHT GROUP; SHALOM AND
CHABOT

1. RABBI HECHT IS PLANNING TO TAKE A GROUP OF AT LEAST 15
AND PERHAPS 25 FROM HIS CONGREGATION TO SYRIA AFTER PASS-
OVER, PROBABLY AROUND APRIL 15. ALL MEMBERS WILL HAVE PASS-
PORTS WHICH SHOW NO VISITS TO ISRAEL. HE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH
WITH SYRIAN AMBASSADOR KABBANI HERE AND LATTER RESPONDED BY
ASKING HECHT MERELY TO GIVE HIM THE NAMES OF THOSE GOING.
VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE MEMBERS WILL HAVE HAD SOME DIRECT OR
INDIRECT INTEREST IN SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY. HECHT IS
THINKING OF SPENDING ABOUT TWO DAYS IN DAMASCUS AND TWO IN
ALEPPO. HE HOPES THAT YOU WOULD ALERT RABBI HAMRA AND
RABBI YOM YEDID OF ALEPPO TO THE FORTHCOMING VISIT. PLEASE
ALSO PROVIDE ANY ADDED SUGGESTIONS FOR THE VISIT WHICH YOU
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MIGHT WANT US TO PASS TO RABBI HECHT.

2. IN PART BECAUSE OF GRUEN'S ACCOUNT OF HIS RECENT VISIT
TO DAMASCUS, REPRESENTATIVE SOLARZ, CARL GLICK OF HIAS,
RABBI HECHT, AND OTHERS IN THE NEW YORK AND BROOKLYN COM-
MUNITY HAVE DECIDED IT WOULD BE WORTHWHILE TO HAVE TWO OTHER
MEN VISIT SYRIA BEFORE PASSOVER AND IN ADVANCE OF RABBI

HECHT'S VISIT. THEY WOULD BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS OF MAKING MONEY AVAILABLE FOR BONDS THAT MAY BE FORFEITED, PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR TAKING CARE OF UNMARRIED GIRLS IF AND WHEN THEY BEGIN TO LEAVE FOR THE U.S., REUNIONS WITH RELATIVES, ETC. ONE OF THE TWO IS STEPHEN SHALOM, WHO, WE UNDERSTAND, IS EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN JEWISH FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES. HE SPEAKS SOME ARABIC. THE SECOND MAN IS A. BERT CHABOT, WHOSE PARENTS WERE BORN IN SYRIA. HE SPEAKS SOME ARABIC AND OTHER LANGUAGES. THEY HOPE TO LEAVE FOR DAMASCUS BY MARCH 12, IF VISAS CAN BE SECURED, WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THIS CANNOT BE GUARANTEED.

3. IN A MARCH 2 MEETING IN REPRESENTATIVE SOLARZ'S OFFICE WITH THESE MEN, AND HIAS REPRESENTATIVES, SHALOM IN PARTICULAR PUSHED HARD TO GET INTO DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. DRAPER IN THE FIRMEST POSSIBLE TERMS EXPLAINED THAT THIS WAS TOTALLY IMPOSSIBLE AT THIS TIME AND A USEFUL CONSENSUS DEVELOPED THAT ALL CONCERNED WOULD BE GUIDED BY YOUR ADVICE ON TACTICS AND STRATEGY. MEETING PROVIDED USEFUL OPPORTUNITY TO REPEAT YOUR VARIOUS CAUTIONARY COMMENTS AND THE INTENTION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SYRIA TO MOVE SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY. ALL APPEARED IMPRESSED ALSO WITH WHAT GRUEN HAD DESCRIBED OF HIS TRIP, INCLUDING HIS SHARP CRITICISM OF THE POTENTIALLY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES OF RABBI GOLDRICH.

4. GRUEN INFORMED US INCIDENTALLY THAT GOLDRICH MAY BE PLANNING TO PUBLISH IN THE MIDDLE WEST THE PAPER YOU HAD GIVEN HIM ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SITUATION. GRUEN
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SAID THAT HE INTENDED TO URGE GOLDRICH NOT TO GENERATE ANY PUBLICITY OF ANY KIND. IN THIS CONNECTION, PARTICIPANTS IN MARCH 2 MEETING MADE CLEAR THEY WERE DETERMINED TO KEEP THE LID ON ALL PUBLICITY.
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